

## THE JUDGE

By Lorraine Viade, PsyD



*The Judge* gives us two tour-de-force performances from Robert Downey, Jr. and Robert Duvall. Playing a savvy, but sardonic, lawyer and his harder-than-nails father, *The Judge* hits home over and over again. The operative word here is estrangement – and all of the factors that lead up to that in a family. How family relationships are forged and tested during trials by fire is beautifully realized here. The dialogue is poetic and realistic and the confrontations ring true. There is a dynamic chemistry between Downey and Duvall that brings out the best in both of them. Old wounds seasoned by bitter tears are torn open to reveal that what defines family is not just who we are related to, but how we relate to those people who define us.

Father and son, brother and brother share their loss and disappointment over time. Love doesn't mean not saying sorry, it means being sorry for the things you did and the things you did not do. Getting older often means being more vulnerable, and subsequently more remorseful. We make mistakes, we hurt others and we hurt ourselves. We try to please our parents and we disappoint our loved ones. We let ourselves down. But when all is said and done, family is all we have left and we will be judged in the end by how we treat those people who share our lives and our stories.

*The Judge* does not sentimentalize these relationships. These are hard asses, each one in his way. Some feisty, some fiery and some simply able to see things for exactly what they are. In the mix, there is some old flame action and an “oops” moment that could have gone terribly wrong. I think it was a message that we should be more accountable and responsible not only to family, but to friends, wives and lovers. There are some very nice supporting characters here.

Vincent D'Onofrio and Vera Farmiga as Downey's older brother and love interest fill in the family tree. Billy Bob Thornton is also on hand to ruffle some of Downey's legal feathers. So what is the verdict for *The Judge*? Good acting, good story and good writing. The jury would need only a few minutes to decide.

*The Judge* is a four gavel movie worth your time and deliberation.

